



WIS 26 BIKE ROUTE PLANNING STUDY

Rock, Jefferson, and Dodge Counties

September 2005

WisDOT ID 1390-05-00



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WisDOT ID 1390-05-00
SEH No. A-WIDOT0470.00

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Executive Summary

The WIS 26 Bike Route Plan has its roots in the WIS 26 Corridor Plan. The WIS 26 Corridor Plan was an effort initiated by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to help communities anticipate and adapt to the changes that will occur when the highway is expanded and bypasses are constructed. The corridor plan included recommendations in many topic areas including the promotion of bicycling for recreational use and transportation. The corridor plan also included planning strategies that will help promote bicycling as transportation systems and land uses change.

The goal of the WIS 26 Bike Route Plan was to identify a network of bike routes parallel to WIS 26 that facilitate bicycle travel between the communities along the corridor. The limits of the study extend from the city of Janesville to WIS 60 north of the city of Watertown. The outcome of the study was a series of routes that use existing roads, trails, and special linkages to promote bicycling as an alternative form of transportation. Routes were classified according to their ultimate feasibility and implementation timeframe.

WisDOT and the study consultant team from Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. (SEH[®]) held several public workshops and open houses to gather input on potential bicycle routes. Several local outreach meetings occurred to gather input from specific user groups including bike clubs, community planning consultants, and agency staff members. To the extent possible, the study process considered the existing and planned bike routes of Rock, Jefferson, and Dodge Counties as well as opportunities to create additional connections to statewide trails. By facilitating inter-county planning, improved coordination and collaboration were achieved, something that was otherwise unlikely to occur.

The outcome of the study was the identification, development, and prioritization of a series of feasible and functional bike routes that provide safe, direct connections between communities. In many cases the routes also provide additional recreational bicycling opportunities by providing missing linkages in the state's trail network. The study also identified some locations where it may be appropriate to plan for some additional linkages that may be possible through a collaborative effort between WisDOT, the county, and the local communities.

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WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Study

Prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation – District 1

1.0 Introduction

In 2004, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) initiated a special bicycle planning study for the State Trunk Highway 26 (WIS 26) corridor in south-central Wisconsin. The corridor is currently planned for a two- to four-lane expansion between the years 2009-2015. The segment of WIS 26 under study is located in three counties and is 48 miles in length. In all, the study area includes more than 25 local units of government along the corridor. There are six incorporated municipalities located on the corridor ranging in population from 1,600 to 60,000. In some cases, only one to two miles separate the communities, thus creating an environment ripe for inter-community bicycle commuting. WisDOT recognized the potential effects that the future highway expansion could have on residents with regard to community connectivity, multi-modal travel, and regional mobility. WisDOT thereby initiated the WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Study to maximize bicycle opportunities along the corridor.

Local bicyclists and community leaders actively collaborated with WisDOT to identify ways to integrate bike routes into the final design of WIS 26. At a special meeting in Jefferson County in January 2004, the bicyclists and leaders identified their preliminary ideas and concerns. As a result of this meeting, WisDOT retained the services of Short Elliott Hendrickson Inc. (SEH[®]) to coordinate a bicycle route planning effort for the WIS 26 corridor.

It is assumed that the bike facility improvements on the WIS 26 corridor are a responsibility that should be shared by local communities and WisDOT. Some of the route improvements can potentially be made by local communities as lands in or near the corridor develop, or as local road improvements are carried out. This report recommends additional route improvements that can be made as part of the WIS 26 expansion project.

There are rail lines near the WIS 26 corridor that are currently active. In some locations around the country, bike trails have been located within the right-of-way of active rail lines as a result of agreements worked out with rail companies. Establishing similar agreements in the project study area was beyond the scope of this effort. For the purposes of this report, it was

assumed that sharing rail right-of-way with active rail lines is not a near-term possibility.

As a point of clarification, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) has the responsibility to manage recreational bicycle trails in the state. WisDOT, in contrast, addresses bike and pedestrian issues as part of highway projects to address transportation needs. Over the course of the study's public involvement process, it became apparent that the distinction between recreational trails and bicycle commuting facilities was not always apparent. The bike paths for commuting found in this report are generally short in comparison to the state's recreational trails. They act as links to serve the transportation needs of travelers in and around communities but, the recommended bike routes also rely on local roads to serve the long-distance movements.

2.0 Study Process

The study officially began in March 2004 and continued through August 2005. The study process used a qualitative and quantitative approach to identify and evaluate routes. The qualitative approach relied on local knowledge and input to guide the identification of potential routes. Qualitative information sources included:

- WisDOT staff
- Local elected officials
- Municipal park and recreation staff, planners, and engineers
- Local bike clubs and bicycling enthusiasts
- General public
- WDNR staff

The quantitative approach included a detailed field review of potential routes using WisDOT's *Planning for Rural Bike Routes* methodology. This review includes an analysis of several road criteria to determine their bicycling suitability. Criteria in the evaluation include:

- Curb lane width
- Bicycle lane width
- Paved shoulder width
- Total pavement width
- Speed limit
- Average daily traffic (ADT)
- Percentage of trucks of the ADT
- Percent yellow line (indication of how hilly or curvy the road is)
- Factor group (road category based on traffic peaking characteristics)

The results of this component of the routes analysis can be found in Appendix A, Bicycle Route Evaluation Matrix. The evaluation was important because it helped identify the characteristics that made some roads unsuitable for bicycling such as high traffic volumes, narrow shoulders, or high truck percentages. By identifying the deficient characteristics, it may be possible to make future road improvements that could address the deficiencies and accommodate bicycling.

Near the conclusion of the bike planning process, the planning team met with WisDOT design staff to review the recommendations. For WisDOT's reference, the improvements that are assumed to be WisDOT's responsibility are highlighted red on Exhibit 1, Recommended Bicycle Routes. Yellow highlighted routes include roads which may be suitable for biking after improvements. The improvements would be the responsibility of local governments. The yellow routes also include segments of existing WIS 26 that will be transferred to a local jurisdiction when the highway project is completed. These routes will be more suitable for bicycle travel when the

vehicle volumes have decreased as a result of travelers moving to the improved/relocated highway.

3.0 Public Involvement

The general public and special interest groups were offered the chance to actively participate in all phases of the study. Through a bike route planning committee, workshops, open houses, and special interest meetings, the study team received a broad base of interest and input in the study.

3.1 WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Committee (BRPC)

The purpose of the committee was to provide the study team with an understanding of local planning efforts and help guide the overall process. Committee members also acted as local liaisons to their communities and special interest groups. They helped keep their respective communities involved in the planning process through meeting notices, email lists, and additional contact information for public meetings.

The first WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Committee meeting was held in April 2004. In all, three committee meetings were held over the course of the study. The BRPC was composed of the following individuals:

Phil Blazkowski – Rock County Planning Department

Greg David – Jefferson County Board Supervisor

Bill Ehlenbeck – Dodge County Planning

Steve Grabow – Jefferson County UW-Extension

Mike Guiselman – Rock County Parks and Recreation

Joe Nehmer – Jefferson County Parks Department

Tom Presny – Janesville Parks Director

3.2 Bicycle Planning Workshops

Two planning workshops were held in July 2004 to engage local bike enthusiasts and to identify bicycle routes. Approximately 40 people participated in the two workshops that were held in Watertown and Jefferson. These meetings included a brief presentation on the overall planning process and the county-level bicycle planning that had occurred to date.

The primary outcome of these workshops was the identification of existing roads and additional connections that would accommodate inter-community bicycling. Workshop participants also suggested special groups to engage in the planning process in order to maximize the breadth of public involvement.

3.3 Bicycle Planning Open Houses

Two open houses were held in November 2004. Approximately 40-50 members of the public attended the two meetings. The purpose of the two open houses was to offer the public a chance to review, comment on, and prioritize the potential bicycle routes. Participants were asked to complete a survey about the routes; the key findings are summarized in the following section.

Appendix B, Potential Bicycle Routes, illustrates the potential routes as they were identified at the Bicycle Planning Workshops and presented at the Open

Houses. The appendix exhibits also show existing/planned bicycle routes and paths identified on local and county bicycle plans. Potential routes are highlighted in yellow. The potential routes were identified at previous workshops, at planning committee meetings, and on local plans.

Once the potential routes were identified, the next step was to evaluate each of the routes and determine their bicycling suitability. The evaluation was based on input from the Bicycle Planning Open Houses, the Bike Route Planning Committee, and staff review.

3.4 Local Government Support

Several local governmental bodies have passed resolutions favoring the development of a separated bicycle path along WIS 26 (see Appendix C, Local Government Bicycle Planning Resolutions). The governments include:

- Village of Johnson Creek
- City of Fort Atkinson
- City of Janesville
- City of Lake Mills
- City of Watertown
- Jefferson County Economic Development Consortium
- Jefferson County

A number of the local representatives on the WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Committee believe that a variety of factors make the project study area, and Jefferson County in particular, a unique environment and worthy of special bicycle planning consideration, including the concept of constructing a separated bicycle path along the entire length of WIS 26. Reasons cited by committee members that make the area unique include: geographic conditions, strong land use controls, planned investment by the Land Legacy Program, strong interest in bicycle commuting between communities, and unified economic development coalitions focused on promoting tourism and expanding transportation options.

Although this plan does not recommend a separated trail along the entire length of WIS 26, there are some locations where a separated trail link is recommended because suitable parallel on-road routes do not exist. During the design process there will be opportunities for communities to request separate bicycle accommodations beyond what is recommended in this plan. Additional facilities may be possible with the financial participation of local communities and a demonstration that accommodations are needed to serve local destinations as part of a planned system.

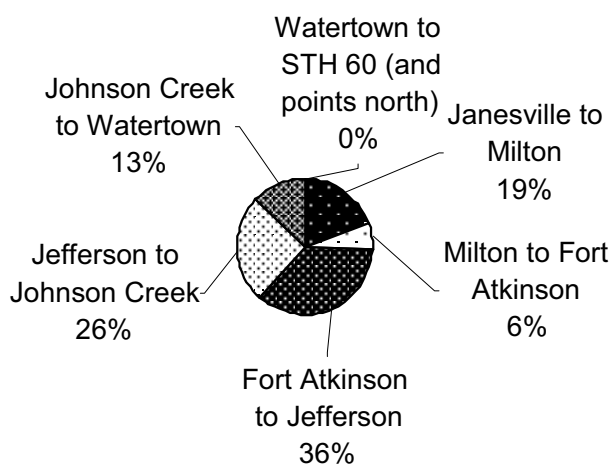
4.0 Evaluation of Route Alternatives

4.1 Public Input

Public input was the first component of the route evaluation process. Participants in the Bicycle Planning Open Houses were asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire included the following questions:

- Between which two communities do you think the greatest *demand* for bicycle facilities exist?
- Between which two communities do you think the greatest *challenges* to bicycling exist?
- Are there any local roads that you think should be considered as potential routes in addition to what is already shown on the maps as potential routes?
- Of the routes shown on the displays, are any of them composed of roads you think are unacceptable for bicycling?

The complete results of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix D, Open House Questionnaire Results. The chart below summarizes responses to the question “Between which two communities do you think the greatest demand for bicycle facilities exist?”



As the questionnaire results show, the highest demand is for bicycle facilities that link the communities that are closest to one another. The proximity between these communities encourages facility usage and help promote bicycle activity as a whole in the region.

The public evaluation of the potential routes revealed that some people prefer dedicated bicycle facilities to on-road routes. Routes that followed railroad corridors and dedicated trails were often the most popular routes between communities. There are several possible explanations for this preference.

The safety and comfort advantages of separated paths that serve a wide range of riding skills is recognized as the most important explanation.

The second explanation may be the type of bicyclists who attended the open house sessions. Many of the attendees were recreational riders rather than avid commuter bicyclists who are generally more skilled bicyclists and more comfortable riding on roads.

The third explanation may be the direct connection that many of the routes would provide. The railroad corridors in particular are often a direct connection between communities, requiring a short traveling distance, which would appeal to many bicyclists. There are significant challenges to developing a bike path or trail in the right-of-way owned by an active rail line, thus, this plan assumes that this would not be a near-term possibility except in unique areas such as where the bypass is proximate to a rail line (such as between the city of Fort Atkinson and the city of Jefferson).

The public's preferences were accounted for by identifying routes that require long-term improvements and/or coordination in addition to the routes that are currently bikeable. This approach provides short- and long-term options.

4.2 Special Interest Meetings

The planning team met with the Janesville Velo Club to share the study's purpose, its findings to-date, and to gather additional input. At the time of the meeting, a series of draft routes were available for review. The Janesville Velo Club provided comments on the draft routes, made suggestions for alternate routes, and shared additional thoughts about bicycling in the area.

The Friends of the Glacial Drumlin Trail also provided comment on the study. Planning staff was in contact with an organizational representative on several occasions to gather feedback about the study and its connections with the Glacial Drumlin Trail.

An additional meeting was held with the consultant planning firm for the village of Johnson Creek who was assisting in the development of a bicycle and pedestrian plan. The study team met with them to ensure that the WIS 26 bike route recommendations were consistent with Johnson Creek's plans. The outcome of this meeting was a set of mutually agreeable bicycle routes in/out of Johnson Creek.

4.3 Road Suitability Evaluation

Section 2.0 documents the criteria that were used to determine road suitability for bicycling. In general, roads with an ADT less than 1,000 are suitable for bicycling regardless of the roadway width. Wider roads provide better facilities for bicycling as long as the traffic volume does not compromise their bikeability. Other significant factors in the final evaluation were truck ADT percentages and the presence/absence of hills and curves. For complete documentation of the route evaluation results see Appendix A, Bicycle Route Evaluation Matrix.

5.0 Strategies and Recommendations

5.1 Recommended Bicycle Routes

The recommended routes were identified based on input from the public, special interest groups, the Bike Planning Committee, and an evaluation of the road suitability criteria. In addition to the routes that were carried forward as recommended routes, there were a number of other routes that were dropped from consideration. For complete documentation of all the routes that were evaluated see Appendix A, Bicycle Route Evaluation Matrix.

As Exhibit 1, Recommended Bicycle Routes shows, there are three categories of route recommendations. The route classifications are as follows:

Green routes are currently bikeable and provide a safe, direct connection between communities. No further improvements are needed.

Yellow routes would provide a direct connection but may require additional improvement(s) and/or long-term planning by local governments, or will become suitable after the traffic currently on them moves to the improved/relocated highway. As land develops near yellow routes, the road facilities should be planned and potentially officially mapped to incorporate bicycle accommodations.

Red routes are segments recommended for construction by WisDOT as part of the WIS 26 expansion project. Typically red routes are segments within yellow routes demonstrating that the facility will be bikeable in the future.

On each map the locations of WIS 26 grade-separated crossings and interchanges are clearly marked. In either case, the WisDOT improvements will most likely include bicycle accommodations. Appendix E, Overpass and Interchange Typical Sections, demonstrates a potential design for the automobile lanes, bicycle lanes, and sidewalks.

A complete description of each route is provided on pages 15-20. Each route is classified by one of the three above categories.

In addition, three specific areas were identified as requiring further analysis during the design phase:

Fort Atkinson to Jefferson Corridor. A connection between Hoard Road to the east and the vicinity of existing WIS 26 would be desirable. This would include a separated bike path connecting the city of Fort Atkinson to the city of Jefferson in the area between the new four-lane highway and existing WIS 26. Further investigation is needed during the design phase to determine if there is enough space for a bike path at this location.

County Farm property on the south side of the city of Jefferson. Efforts are underway for a planned development on the Jefferson County Farm property on the south side of the city of Jefferson. During the design phase discussions should be held about opportunities for creating a separated bike path along the bypass. These discussions should occur as a partnership with the city of Jefferson and Jefferson County.

South side of Watertown from Zillge Lane to County A. During the design phase discussions should be held about opportunities to create biking facilities in this location, in partnership with the city of Watertown and Jefferson County.

5.1.1 Local Officials Recommendation

The local representatives on the WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Committee requested consideration of a concept in which the detailed design would include a separated bike path along WIS 26 at a future time. WisDOT would not be committed to construction at this time. The concept would include a separated bike path in the locations where such a facility is not recommended within this report.

The local representatives believe there are considerable opportunities for partnering among private businesses, local government, state agencies (WDNR, Wisconsin Department of Tourism, Wisconsin Department of Commerce, and WisDOT), and federal agencies if the plan provides for more extensive separated bike path segments. This area of Wisconsin is being positioned as one of the highest demand bicycle regions in Wisconsin. Local officials believe it would be short-sighted to not plan for a separated bike path along WIS 26 and are confident that issues of funding, maintenance, and phasing can be successfully negotiated.

During the design phase, these issues will be discussed further. WisDOT will determine if provision can be made for additional separated facilities beyond those recommended within this report.

The local representatives of the committee also requested consideration of a bike connection to Bicentennial Park which is located on the east side of WIS 26. The primary use of the park is as a dog exercise area, mostly accessed by automobiles. A separate structure/facility is likely not justified.

5.2 Implementation Timeframe

Exhibit 2, WIS 26 Construction Schedule is based on WisDOT's current timeframe for the WIS 26 improvements from the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that was conducted for the corridor. The improvements are planned to occur in several segments between 2009 and 2015.

5.3 General Recommendations

For many cyclists, separated bike paths are the ideal facilities. In locations where these facilities do not exist, state, county, and local roads can often provide excellent opportunities for bicycling with few or no improvements. Regardless of the specific route, there are some steps that can be taken locally and regionally. State and county highways often provide the most direct routes between destinations and bicyclists who are commuting often prefer to take the most direct route possible.

This section documents general recommendations that can be taken to help improve local bicycling conditions on existing roads.

- Paved shoulders should be included on any local and county roads that are part of bicycle routes. Resurfacing or reconstruction projects offer a good opportunity for such improvements. The potential for additional bicycle routes should be considered on all other roads to determine if shoulder paving is needed.
- The primary roads entering communities may be especially heavily traveled and hinder bicycle activity. Paving shoulders and/or designating bike lanes should be high-priority projects on the edges of communities.
- Local governments should include this study's recommended routes in their respective bicycle, multi-modal, transportation, and comprehensive plans. By adopting the recommended routes, it increases the likelihood that the WIS 26 bike routes will be successfully implemented.

5.4 On-going Coordination Recommendations

To fully realize the benefits of the bicycle route planning efforts, there are many on-going issues and opportunities that need to be pursued. This section summarizes those issues and opportunities.

- The WisDOT planning team should work with WisDOT Central Office to explore the long-term feasibility of using some railroad corridors for bicycling. Shared-use corridors and rails-to-trails conversions are two on-going issues.
- The WisDOT regional planning staff should work with WDNR and WisDOT Central office staff to identify locations where right-of-way along active rail lines could potentially be used to meet bicycling transportation needs, where other facilities are less than ideal. In addition, there may be other opportunities for WisDOT and WDNR to collaborate to provide facilities that meet transportation and recreational bicycling needs.
- The WisDOT planning team should coordinate with WisDOT's final design engineers for the WIS 26 EIS improvements. Exhibit 1, Recommended Bicycle Routes, highlight in red the connections that WisDOT would construct as part of the WIS 26 improvements. These segments are part of long-term routes that have been identified as potential connections between communities.

- WisDOT's project design teams should coordinate with the WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Committee. The committee has expressed a strong interest in continuing its work and communicating their desires with WisDOT as the process continues into final design.
- Rock County Corporate Council should conduct title searches of parcels near the former rail bed north of Milton to determine legal ownership. Once the ownership is determined, local planning and parks staff should collaborate with the property owners to extend the trail along the rail bed.
- WisDOT should coordinate bicycle route planning with the proposed Jefferson County Farm development to ensure that transportation linkages in/out of the new development from the bypass are available.
- WisDOT should continue to work with local planners, parks staff, engineers, and bicycle enthusiasts to aid in the implementation of the WIS 26 Bicycle Route Plan. They can help promote the plan and provide local connections to the state-recommended routes.
- Additionally, local community planning staff should integrate the recommendations of this plan into local bicycle plans wherever possible.
- Local governments should develop a long-term coordinated signage plan that identifies commuting routes. Where applicable, the recommended routes should be integrated with existing county bike route signs.

5.5 Improvement Funding

5.5.1 Federal and State Funding

5.5.1.1 Wisconsin Department of Transportation

One means of funding bicycle facility improvements is through WisDOT's Local Transportation Enhancements (TE) program. Federal legislation called TEA-21, the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century, provides federal funds for a variety of improvements. The goal of TE program was established to increase multi-modal transportation alternatives and enhance the communities and the environment. This program requires a 20% local funding match to be eligible for the federal funds.

To be eligible for funding, the projects must fit one of twelve categories. Two of the categories are specifically related to bicycling. The two categories are:

- Provision of facilities for pedestrians/bicycles*
- Provision of safety and educational activities for pedestrians & bicyclists

*Under federal guidelines, TE funding can be used for many types of bicycle facilities. WisDOT places an emphasis on funding facilities that will serve trips that might otherwise be made by automobile.

Please visit the following website for additional information:

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/localgov/aid/te.htm>

5.5.1.2 **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has cataloged potential funding sources for trail projects. This document identifies WDNR contacts, procedures, and other funding sources. A .PDF version of the document can be found at:

http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/parks/reports/trail_funding/PR-464%202003.pdf

5.5.2 Private Funding Sources

In addition to state and federal funding sources, local governments should explore the possibility of acquiring private funds. Potential funding sources include:

- Local businesses
- Private foundations
- National organizations that support bicycling

5.6 Bicycle Planning Resources

There are several excellent resources available on the internet that provide information about bicycle route planning and design and about bicycling in general.

- WisDOT information on bicycles as a form of transportation and funding:

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/modes/bicycles.htm>

- Wisconsin Bicycle Facility Design Handbook:

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/state/docs/bike-facility.pdf>

- Bike Federation of Wisconsin:

<http://www.bfw.org/>

- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center:

<http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/>

- League of American Bicyclists:

<http://www.bikeleague.org/>

6.0 Conclusion

The goal of the WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Study was to plan a network of bike routes in the WIS 26 corridor to that facilitate bicycle travel between the communities along the corridor. The outcome of the study was the identification and prioritization of a series of routes that use existing roads and new linkages that will be built as part of the WIS 26 highway expansion project. Routes were classified according to their ultimate feasibility and implementation timeframe. In many cases the routes also provide additional recreational bicycling opportunities by providing missing linkages in the state's trail network.

The long-term success of the plan, realizing an increase in bicycle commuting in the study area, will only be achieved if WisDOT, local governments, and bicycle enthusiasts continue to cooperatively promote the recommended routes and expand bicycling options. Through a collaborative effort local awareness can be increased, interest can be generated, and ultimately more people will take advantage of current and future bicycling opportunities.

The local representatives on the WIS 26 Bike Route Planning Committee requested consideration of a concept in which the detailed design would include a provision for a separated bike path along the entire length of WIS 26 that WisDOT would not be committed to construct at this time. The concept would include a separated bike path in the locations where such a facility is not recommended within this report. During the design phase these issues will be discussed further, and WisDOT will determine if a provision can be made for additional separated facilities beyond those recommended within this report.